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**Teaching Culture Through Videos**

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# **Teaching Culture Through Videos**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Teaching Culture Through Videos**

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This study examines the importance of teaching culture in foreign language education. Different goals for teaching culture are reviewed, emphasizing the advantages and implications of having the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1996, 1999, 2006). A historical overview of varied approaches to teaching culture is presented, starting with the traditional facts-oriented approach, and leading to modern approaches that focus on developing critical thinking skills. The report analyzes the use of videos in foreign language teaching, highlighting their many advantages. Empirical studies supporting the use of videos in teaching culture are reviewed. The literature review indicates that videos have only been used to teach cultural facts so far. In response, a pedagogical model based on videos is proposed that encourages a critical-thinking approach to culture. The model is explained using a video-based lesson for intermediate level learners.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. GOALS AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING CULTURE.....	4
Goals for Teaching Culture .....	4
Traditional Approaches to Teaching Culture .....	9
Modern Approaches to Teaching Culture .....	15
III. USE OF VIDEOS FOR TEACHING .....	22
Videos for Teaching a Foreign Language .....	22
Videos for Teaching Culture .....	27
Advantages of Using Videos for Teaching Culture .....	31
IV. DEVELOPING A CRITICAL-THINKING APPROACH TO CULTURE USING VIDEOS .....	33
The Model .....	33
Match.com vs. Shaadi.com: Understanding the Culture of ‘Arranged Marriage’ in India .....	35
V.CONCLUSION .....	45
VI. REFERENCES.....	47

## I. INTRODUCTION

For decades academics and researchers have highlighted the importance of teaching culture in the language classroom claiming that culture is essential to understanding and learning a language. As one of the earliest proponents of teaching culture explicitly in the language classroom, Brooks (1968) argued for bringing culture from elitist pursuits to everyday situations. More recently, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1996, 1999, 2006)—also known as the National Standards—have most strongly articulated the inseparable link between learning language and culture in the foreign language classroom.

I became interested in understanding the fundamental link between language and culture during my first visit to the U.S. as a cultural exchange student in 2007. Tasked with teaching Hindi to undergraduate classes, I was intrigued by how students often struggled to comprehend a word or phrase in Hindi because they did not know the cultural context in which the word evolved and flourished. For example, unless they were familiar with the Hindu philosophy of rebirth, I found my students stumped by phrases like *phichel janam ka paap* (an immoral deed one committed in their previous life). Along similar lines, my own understanding of American English began to increase as I discovered and became exposed to aspects of the American culture that were new to me. Idioms like “holding the line” and “drinking the kool aid” soon became part of my lexicon. I have

been fortunate to experience, both as a teacher and as a student, that it truly is important to understand culture in order to effectively learn and appreciate a foreign language.

A review of the literature in the field of language teaching revealed that language educators have identified different goals and proposed various approaches for teaching culture in the language classroom. Early goals, as proposed by Lafayette (1978), Lafayette and Schulz (1975), and Seelye (1974), emphasized studying cultural facts, understanding culturally bound behaviors, understanding how cultural variations influence the use of the target language, learning to behave in a culturally appropriate manner, and developing positive attitudes towards the target culture. These goals were later distilled in the National Standards, which acknowledged the importance of cultural facts, and identified three aspects of culture: products, practices, and perspectives. According to the National Standards, the aim of cultural learning is for students to understand the relation between cultural products, practices, and perspectives through comparisons and contrasts of the target culture and their own culture.

Since the publication of the National Standards, the trend in teaching approaches has moved from a fact-oriented approach to a critical thinking approach. The critical thinking approach is often complemented by the use of authentic teaching resources, such as videos, literary texts, and images. Amongst these, videos provide the most benefits since they are dynamic in nature and provide a vibrant, accessible view of culture in the foreign language classroom.

The purpose of this report is to explore the literature on teaching culture in order to suggest a theoretically and empirically-based approach to teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. To this aim, the first chapter of this report reviews the goals for teaching culture and discusses past and present approaches to teaching culture. The second chapter identifies how videos are used in language and culture teaching, and outlines some of the benefits of teaching culture through videos. The final chapter proposes a pedagogical model for developing a critical approach to teaching culture through videos.



## **II. GOALS AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING CULTURE**

Historically, many language educators have argued in favor of including culture in foreign language pedagogy. For almost fifty decades researchers have identified a range of goals, and offered a number of approaches for teaching culture. This chapter reviews some of the influential ideas proposed in the field over the years. The first section traces the development of cultural goals, while the second and third sections discuss traditional and modern approaches to teaching culture.

### **Goals for Teaching Culture**

In the 70s, Seelye (1974) outlined seven goals for cultural instruction. These goals have influenced many scholars for decades. Seelye's first goal entailed learners to understand why people from the target culture behave differently. He argued that people from the target culture behave differently because their actions are governed by societal norms. From an ethnocentric position, these actions may appear "bizarre or perplexing" (p. 40). However, as Seelye cautioned, students must learn to understand that people behave within the framework of their given culture. Seelye's second, third, and fourth goals focused on how various linguistic, situational, and social factors may affect people's behaviors. These goals evoked learner's attention to the close relation between language and culture. According to Seelye, teaching culture includes familiarizing students with different registers, tones, dialects and modes of speech present in the target community. Students should know how social factors like age, sex, class, and region affect a person's

speech in the target culture. This knowledge helps them converse in a socially appropriate manner. Seelye's fifth and sixth goals emphasized evaluating the validity of biased opinions about the target culture based on empirical evidence, and developing necessary research skills to study the target culture. These skills are necessary in developing positive attitudes towards people from the target culture. Seelye (1993) later summarized these goals as helping students develop "interest in *who* in the target culture did *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why*" (p. 30).

Along similar lines, Lafayette and Schulz (1975) proposed three fundamental goals for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom: (a) knowledge, (b) understanding, and (c) behavior. The first goal entails acquiring factual information about the selected patterns of the target culture, while the second goal includes developing the ability to comprehend and analyze cultural facts in context. The final goal relates to the learner's ability to act appropriately in a given cultural surrounding. Building on these goals, Lafayette (1978) later proposed the following objectives for teaching culture: (a) knowledge of big "C" culture that includes geographical features, historical events, and aesthetic monuments; (b) knowledge of little "c" culture that includes everyday patterns of behavior and common gestures; (c) ability to collect and organize information about the target culture; (d) learning to value people; and (e) being aware of multiple cultures associated with a specific language.

The early goals for cultural instruction thus emphasized studying cultural facts, understanding culturally bound behaviors, understanding how cultural variations

influence the use of the target language, learning to behave in a culturally appropriate manner, and developing positive attitudes towards the target culture.

These different objectives of cultural learning were synthesized in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning Preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1996, 1999, and 2006). The National Standards identified understanding Cultures as one of the five objectives for foreign language learning, and stated that students cannot truly master a foreign language ‘until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the languages occur’ (p. 3). The Standards outlined the following goals for learning culture:

*Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.*

*Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.*

*Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.*

The National Standards acknowledged the importance of cultural facts, and identified two aspects of culture in this regard: products and practices. Cultural products refer to what was earlier called the big “C”. These include tangible components like paintings, literary books and intangible components like dance, sacred ritual, and system of education. Cultural practices, on the other hand, refer to little “c”, and include patterns of behavior, and use of space and discourse. The Standards moved beyond the traditional dichotomy of big “C” and little “c” by identifying a third aspect of culture: perspectives. Cultural

perspectives are the overarching traditional ‘meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas’ (p. 6) that shape the tangible and intangible products, and define the patterns of social interaction or practices in a given culture. According to the National Standards, cultural understanding implies the ability to use higher-order critical thinking skills to evaluate why a given culture does what it does. By emphasizing the study of cultural products and practices in relation to perspectives, the National Standards highlighted the interdependent nature of different aspects of culture.

A number of researchers have helped explain the advantages of having the National Standards. According to Arens (2010), traditional foreign language classrooms often provide a very factual treatment to teaching culture by primarily focusing on knowledge-based artifacts, such as social roles, historical dates, names, and such. The National Standards corrected this myopic view by proposing that teaching a culture means “not only acquiring its knowledge base, but also the strategic competencies needed to function within it” (p. 160). Arens cautioned, though, that the National Standards are not a rigid benchmark for appropriate language acquisition. Instead, they delineated the stages that a language learner has to advance through in a typical learning sequence, and provided guidelines to be met at each level.

Tang (2006) suggested that the National Standards will help Foreign Language programs reassess their goals of teaching culture. Rather than treating cultural products and practices as self-contained entities and phenomena, the National Standards shifted focus to the “underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes that generate the cultural products and

sanction the codes of behavior commonly adopted by the members of the given society” (p. 90).

Dema and Moeller (2012) believe that the Standards have transformed how learners in a foreign language classroom should absorb what is being taught. Instead of just passively obtaining their knowledge, students become active inquirers, “who investigate and discover their own, as well as a second or third culture” (p. 95). Inquiry-based teaching could thus help students in revealing the hidden meanings and significances in a foreign culture and, thus, develop understanding of cultural differences. One of the major goals for a teacher would therefore be to create inquiry-based questions that promote curiosity and interest in the target culture.

Following up on the National Standards, the recent MLA (2007) report suggests that language programs should aim towards developing translingual and transcultural competence in language learners. Translingual and transcultural competence relates to the learners’ ability to function between different languages, where learners can “function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language” (p. 4). Transcultural competence also requires learners “to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture” and “to comprehend speakers of the target language as members of foreign societies” (p. 4). According to the MLA report, the goal of cultural teaching is to challenge the learners’ imagination, and help them consider an alternate world view. In order to do that, teachers should “encourage students to ask significant questions about their own and the target cultures,

look at the world with a critical eye, and recognize as valid, if not actually enter, another mindset and way of being” (p. 424, Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010).

Based on the above discussion, one can argue that language educators have always envisioned high standards for learning culture in the foreign language classroom. A culturally competent learner is expected to gain information on all aspects of the target culture, acquire analytic and comparative skills, demonstrate cross-cultural understanding, and develop empathy to the target culture. However, to convert these principles into practice has proved challenging for foreign language teachers. As Crozet and Liddicoat (1997) put it aptly, “To make culture visible is one thing to make its variable nature graspable and teachable is another” (p. 10). The following sections review the different approaches for teaching culture proposed over the years, beginning with the traditional approaches, followed by recent approaches that are framed around the National Standards.

### **Traditional Approaches to Teaching Culture**

In the early 1950s, the Grammar Translation Method was the popular method of language learning. Learners focused on learning grammar, building vocabulary, and translating literary texts from their L1 into the L2 and vice versa. Their primary goal for learning a foreign language was to understand the great literary masterpieces of the target culture, and learn more about its civilization. There was thus a focus on learning about what is now called ‘high’ or big “C” culture. The textbooks used during this time were abound with pictures of famous people, places, historical events, and excerpts from literature

(Grittner, 1996). According to Grittner (1996), these cultural images were not connected to linguistic forms introduced in the lessons. This trend reflected a disjoint in language and culture teaching, where teaching culture implied imparting information about the products and achievements of the target culture.

The emergence of the audio-lingual method in the 1960s shifted the focus of culture teaching from big “C” to little “c” culture (Byrd et al., 2011; Hadley, 2001). Influenced by ongoing research in anthropology, Brooks (1968) argued that learners in the foreign language classroom should focus on studying the individual, and not only the civilization. He insisted that language teachers should perceive culture as patterns of living, and emphasized ‘the individual’s role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and the rules and models for attitude and conduct in the classroom’ (p. 210). Brooks also identified a range of topics that teachers could introduce in class to impart interesting information about the target culture. The topics ranged from everyday life like greetings, festivals, and cleanliness to morphology of personal exchange. This inventory of cultural themes was reminiscent of the audio-lingual method where language was seen as a set of limited patterns.

With the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s, the focus in language learning shifted from learning rules to communicating in a context. With respect to teaching culture, this implied employing classroom techniques that illustrated the accepted behavioral and linguistic norms in the target culture. In keeping with these ideas, many scholars developed models for analysis of culture that were

focused on exploring behavioral differences between the learners' native and target cultures (Hughes, 1986). Emphasizing the importance of exposing students to cultural differences, Morain (1983) argued that "differences are what define the edges of cultures and give them shape. Differences in the textures and colors of cultures do exist and make the world richer" (p. 408). These cultural differences were studied using comparative techniques, where learners first read or gathered information on how people in the target culture behaved, and then compared those patterns with behavioral patterns in their own culture. The following classroom techniques for understanding differences in culturally bound behaviors have been recommended by many scholars over the years (Hadley, 2001; Hendon, 1980; Hughes, 1986; Lafayette, 1978; Morain, 1983; Seelye, 1974):

**Short Presentation:** This technique includes giving a brief lecture on a cultural topic at the beginning of the class. Teachers use pictures and slides to make the presentation interesting. Topics like food, clothing, foreign words in the language, and so on are covered in the presentations (see Hendon, 1980, for examples).

**Comparison:** In this activity, the teacher presents an aspect of the target culture that is different from the student's own culture. For example, Hendon (1980) suggests discussing cultural differences with statements like this: A Frenchman enjoys looking at attractive young women openly, while in the United States men are less obvious in their girl watching.

**Culture Assimilator:** This technique was developed by social psychologists to facilitate adjustment to a foreign culture. A cultural assimilator describes an episode of



miscommunication between an American and a member of the target culture. The description is followed by four possible explanations out of which students are expected to select the correct option. Appropriate feedback is provided based on what the students select; if they choose the wrong answer, they are directed to collect more information that can lead them to the correct selection (see Seelye, 1974, for detailed examples).

**Culture Capsule:** In a culture capsule, the teacher uses visuals or other realia to illustrate one minimal difference between two cultures. The description is followed by a set of questions that stimulate classroom discussion. Students can either read a culture capsule from a book or watch it on tape prepared by the teacher (Hadley, 2001; Hendon 1980; Seelye, 1974).

**Culture Clusters:** A culture cluster is a combination of three culture capsules that develop related topics followed by a thirty-minute role play or skit. The skit illustrates the information in the capsules at the end (Morain, 1983; Seelye, 1974).

**Culture Mini-Drama:** In this activity, students enact episodes of miscommunication or cultural conflict between an American and a person from the target culture. After each episode, the teacher leads a discussion where students try to explain the source of miscommunication (see Hendon, 1980, for examples).

**Audio-Motor Unit:** This technique is a ten-minute listening activity that draws on the Total Physical Response method. The teacher gives out oral commands on what to do in a cultural situation. The students respond by physically acting out the steps. Examples of

cultural situations include how to eat in a Spanish restaurant (Hendon, 1980), or how to enjoy a Sunday hike in the German forest (Morain, 1983).

The culture teaching methods discussed so far dissected culture into two separate segments: culture was either taught as civilization (big “C”) as in the Grammar Translation Method, or as daily patterns of behavior (little “c”) as in the activities discussed above. These methods reflected a facts-oriented approach to teaching culture. Such an approach has been criticized on several grounds:

1. A facts-oriented approach leads to a superficial understanding of culture since learning cultural facts alone develops a ‘tourist’s perspective’ of the foreign culture (Kramsch, 1983).
2. Teaching facts about the target culture can also lead to stereotypes since students tend to view the target culture from their own culture’s framework (Kramsch, 1983; Moore, 1995).
3. Teaching cultural facts in class does not actively engage students in the process of learning and results in boredom (Jourdain, 1998).
4. A facts-oriented approach does not help achieve the goals of cultural competence laid out by the National Standards because it fails to provide opportunities for students to reflect on cultural values related to the target language and their own culture.
5. A facts-oriented approach also fails to capture the dynamic element of culture (Paige et al. 2003). As Paige et al. (2003) pointed out, focus on surface level behaviors results in culture being perceived as ‘a relatively invariable and static entity made up of accumulated, classifiable, observable, thus eminently teachable and learnable facts’ (p. 176). A very static image of culture emerged in Morain’s (1983) description of the culture capsule, where “all tools of language teaching (images, notes, etc.) could be filed away in a neatly labeled shoebox and stored for future reference” (p. 403).

Even though the facts-oriented approach has been widely criticized, it cannot be completely disregarded in foreign language learning contexts. The facts-oriented approach can be a good starting point in teaching contexts where learners have limited opportunities to interact with native speakers, and fewer resources to explore the target culture (Byram & Feng, 2004). In these contexts, educators have proposed what Byram and Feng (2004) call the ‘knowledge-for-scrutiny’ approach for teaching culture that develops the facts-oriented approach into a ‘critical model’ (p. 160). Hu and Gao (1997, as cited in Byram & Feng, 2004) use this approach with foreign language learners in China who they claim are too ignorant of the basic facts about the culture they are studying. In accordance with this model, these learners are first taught stereotypical knowledge about the target culture. This knowledge is, however, immediately put under scrutiny by providing learners with a variety of representations of the cultural products or concepts under discussion (Byram & Feng, 2004). This practice forces the learners to reevaluate their perceptions about the target culture, and realize that understanding the target culture is more complicated than what appears from facts. As the learners continue to engage in this process of constant scrutiny, they learn to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the target culture.

The idea of moving from facts to critical thinking is fundamental to the goals for cultural learning outlined in the National Standards. Since the development of the National Standards, many language educators have proposed teaching models that help learners analyze facts in light of underlying cultural beliefs and values. In other words, these models help learners understand the relation between cultural products and practices to

cultural perspectives. Some of these important models are discussed in the following section.

### **Modern Approaches to Teaching Culture**

Modern approaches to teaching culture differ in their characteristics and tasks, but share a common goal: to help learners understand the relation between cultural products and practices to cultural perspectives.

For example, Jourdain's (1998) 'building connections to culture' model takes learners from an information gathering stage to a stage where they understand that "different" does not carry the connotation of "aberrant" or "abhorrent" (p. 443). In this three-step model, learners first research information on a given topic; share this information with their peers through communicative classroom activities; and finally, reflect on the culture's values with respect to the information collected. An activity that illustrates this model begins with a pair of students collecting information about a geographical location in the foreign country (France in this article). After this information-gathering activity, the students engage in a role-play activity where one member of each pair acts as a representative/travel agent from the pair's region while the other member acts as a client/tourist seeking to plan a trip. The final stage involves pooling information about the region and analyzing its underlying historical and cultural background. For the final step, Jourdain advocates using a sociological model for cultural studies called the Kluckhohn model. According to the Kluckhohn model, as Jourdain explains, there are a limited number of common problems that all communities face and a limited range of possible

solutions to those problems. A community's value-orientation can be determined based on how it responds to the given problem. As an example, one could look at how a given society views man's relation to nature. Based on the Kluckhohn model, man's relation to nature can be viewed in three ways: "man may be subject to nature, in harmony with nature, or a master over nature" (p. 443). Hence, the given society's value orientation would lie in any one of these categories. The dominant American society's value orientation, for instance, is categorized as 'mastery over nature.' This absolute categorization of values limits the scope of the Kluckhohn model for teaching cultural perspectives. However, the Kluckhohn model has identified useful ideas that can help start a high level discussion on cultural values in class, and introduce students to differences in value-orientations.

Storme and Derakhshani (2002)'s model for developing cultural proficiency involves three steps: (a) a preparatory stage, (b) a teaching stage; and (c) evaluation. The preparatory stage is aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards the target culture, and encouraging students to reflect on their own culture. Drawing on previous research, the scholars offer helpful suggestions on how teachers can address stereotypes about the target culture. A suggested activity is asking students to describe the target culture and assessing their attitudes based on their choice of adjectives. According to Storme and Derakhshani, this activity is likely to elicit certain stereotypes about the target culture which can be addressed by introducing learners to images that run counter to commonly perceived stereotypes. For instance, introducing an image of a skyscraper in Africa will make students question their stereotypical ideas of a 'poor' Africa. An activity like this

may not immediately change student's views about the target culture, but it will force them to consider an alternate opinion nevertheless. In the next two stages of their model, the scholars address the 'thorny issue' of assessing cultural proficiency. They begin by acknowledging that assessing attitudes and beliefs is difficult. However, they further argue that by not testing what we teach, we are marginalizing the study of culture in the foreign language classroom. To support this argument, they propose different classroom evaluation activities that integrate the teaching of language and culture through a thematic approach. For example, in an activity based around the theme of food and dining, learners can look at a photo of a dining scene from a Francophone culture, and try to draw conclusions concerning table manners and polite dining behavior. According to the writers, the evaluation of learners' performance on such an activity should not be restricted to linguistic features. To ensure the integration of language and culture learning, learners' responses should be evaluated for cultural appropriateness along with linguistic accuracy. Even though Storme and Derakhshani's (2002) proposed methods of assessing cultural proficiency are easy to implement in the classroom, they are somewhat limited in that they only evaluate learners' knowledge of cultural behaviors.

In another classroom approach, Barnes-Karol and Broner (2010) propose using images as springboards to teach cultural perspectives. In this multistage process, learners first learn to describe and analyze a given image from the target culture. As part of this analysis, learners reflect on their culture as they try to find possible equivalents of the cultural phenomenon represented in the image to their own culture. Following this 'pre-reading/pre-viewing stage,' learners work with additional images and texts in the

‘reading/viewing stage’ to understand multiple points of view associated with the given cultural phenomenon, and to avoid making generalizations based on a single image. In the final stage, the ‘post-reading/post-viewing stage,’ learners are evaluated on their ability to synthesize cultural information and articulate a comprehensive description of the target cultural phenomenon under study. To illustrate their extended approach, the writers use images from the *Hungary Planet: What the World Eats* (Menzel & D’Aluisio, 2005, as cited in Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010) to teach learners “The Culture of Food in the Spanish-Speaking World” (p. 430, see Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010, for details).

Barnes-Karol and Broner’s (2010) product-to-perspectives model for teaching culture highlights the importance of exposing learners to multiple sources of information in culture teaching. The model further elaborates the importance of developing higher-order language skills to facilitate learner’s comprehension of cultural perspectives. According to the scholars, learners require more nuanced language structures to analyze complex cultural ideas. The cognitive demands of the cultural analysis thus “provide a natural context for explicit language instruction and practice, always tied to the cultural content at hand, to help students with academic analysis in the L2” (p. 434).

The above discussed classroom models illustrate what can be termed as the critical-thinking approach to teaching culture. Based on the above discussion, the following important features of the critical-thinking approach to culture can be identified: (a) evaluating stereotypes in light of additional cultural information; (b) becoming aware of one’s own cultural framework, and how it effects the interpretation of a foreign

phenomenon; and (c) developing the necessary language skills required to describe and analyze the given target culture phenomenon.

An alternative approach to teaching culture is based on the ethnographic research model. The ethnographic research model was developed by anthropologists to ‘study exotic societies’ by living with local inhabitants, and by observing their culture ‘from inside’ (Byram & Feng, 2004, p. 155). In language education, ethnography is mainly used by sociolinguists to study the interrelationship between language and society. The use of the ethnographic approach for culture teaching is most effective in naturalistic settings; that is, when the learners are living in the country they want to study, as in the case of study abroad (Byram & Feng, 2004). In the classroom, this approach translates into undertaking detailed research projects, where learners are first trained in ethnographic research techniques, given opportunities to practice interview skills, and then connected with the target language speakers. Empirical studies show that ethnographic projects are successful in developing positive attitudes and openness towards second language communities (Bateman, 2002; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Some researchers have extended the concept to connect native speakers from across the world through the Internet. *The Cultura Project* (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001) is a notable example of a virtual ethnographic project that aims at enhancing cross-cultural understanding between the French native speakers in France, and the native English speakers in the U.S. via online discussions.



Although opportunities to interact with the native speakers in the ethnographic approach promise to offer a better understanding of the target culture, practical challenges in implementing this approach make it less useful for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Ethnographic projects demand unrealistic effort on the part of the teacher, as Byram and Feng (2004) remind us, “teachers first of all need to be ethnographers themselves capable of dealing with cultural issues with understanding and sensitivity” (p. 156). Further, the extended process of training learners in ethnographic interview skills can be very time consuming. Moreover, it is not always possible to find a large population of native informants for a given teaching context. This is especially true of the less commonly taught languages like Arabic, Swahili, etc.

Unlike ethnographic research, using authentic resources is a more practical and useful approach for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Teaching resources like videos and newspapers help teachers bring culture to the classroom, especially in contexts where learners do not have the opportunity to experience the target language directly in the country. Moreover, the use of authentic materials for teaching culture is in keeping with the fifth goal of the National Standards (2006) that states that, for language learning to be a life-long process, learners must continue to enrich their personal lives by accessing various entertainment and information sources available to speakers of the target language.

In recent years, scholars have proposed using a range of resources for teaching culture: videos and films (Bueno, 2009; Herron, Cole, Corrie, & Dubriel, 1999; 2000; 2002),

literature (Porto, 2003; Scott & Huntington, 2002), and images (Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010; Bush, 2007). Amongst the many resources available, videos offer the most exciting possibilities for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Unlike literature and still images, videos offer a more vibrant view of culture, and have greater potential to engage the learner at multiple sensory levels.

The use of videos in teaching language and culture started early in the 1980s, and it has continued to grow since then. Language educators value videos as they provide authentic linguistic and cultural input (Moore, 1995), and a communicative context for learning language and culture (Garza, 1996). Research shows that videos have been effectively used to teach little ‘c’ and big “C”, and to spark critical discussions about the target culture. The following chapter reviews in detail the literature that supports using videos for teaching language and culture.

### **III. USE OF VIDEOS FOR TEACHING**

Many language educators support the use of videos for language instruction. Videos have emerged as a useful tool for teaching various aspects of language including reading (Garza, 1991), writing (Holden, 2000; Kasper, 2000), listening (Garza, 1991; Herron & Hanley, 1992), and speaking (Weyers, 1999). However, the literature in this field is dominated by theoretical reviews rather than empirical studies, especially with respect to teaching culture. The following sections provide an overview of how and why videos have been used in the language classroom. The first section reviews the use of videos for language teaching. The second section offers empirical support on how using videos for teaching culture is effective. Finally, the third section lists the many benefits of using videos in the language classroom.

#### **Videos for Teaching a Foreign Language**

Videos help learners perceive all aspects of communication—the speaker, the listener, the setting, and the situation (Lonergan, 1984).

The language learner can easily see the ages of the participants; their sex; perhaps their relation to one another; their dress, social status, and what they are doing; and perhaps their mood or feelings. Further, paralinguistic features, such as facial expressions or hand gestures, are available to accompany aural clues of intonation. (p. 4)

In other words, videos present language in action. Unlike the static expressions of the textbook, videos create a thorough and dynamic context of communication. It is impossible to discern the paralinguistic features of communication from a textbook. As

Sherman (2003) points out ‘a small amount of showing is worth hours of telling from a teacher or a coursework’ (p. 2).

In a brief history of the development of videos, Wood (1999) pointed out that the advancement of control features of video (fast forward, rewind, pause, remote control etc.) in the 1980s made videos more accessible for domestic and pedagogical use. The development of the videocassette recorder/player technology further facilitated the use of videotaped foreign language materials, and led to a ‘video explosion’ in the classroom (Joiner, 1990). During the early 1990s, many commercially multimedia instructional programs like *EELT videos*, *New First Certificate Masterclass Video*, *English Channel 1*, and *Headway Video Elementary* became popular for ESL/EFL teaching. These programs included videotapes that were specially designed for the foreign language learner. Garza (2009) labeled these types of videos “created videos.” In these created videos, the author has complete control of the language, character, and situational development (Garza, 1996). That is, authors can design lessons that focus on specific vocabulary, grammatical structures or themes within the context of a planned storyline, and develop supporting materials simultaneously with the video segments (Garza, 1996). Instructional videos, hence, allow for more focused and structured instruction in class.

A video-based language program that has often been researched in the field is *French in Action* (Capretz, 1988; 1994). This program includes scripted teleplays created around topics like food and drink, transportation, education, etc. The videos include a 10-minute dramatic portion enacted out by native French speakers, followed by a 20-minute

pedagogical portion where expressions and situations in the teleplay are explained. In addition, there is a workbook and an audio program which focus on listening, reading and writing exercises. Outlining the advantages of *French in Action*, Secules, Herron and Tomasello (1992) state that:

The program has a planned immersion approach that plunges students into the French language requiring them to listen to scripted, yet authentic French speech as they watch native speakers interacting in French cultural situations on videos. It gives students the advantage of an immersion method at the same time that it structures the way the students learn the language. It is much more than a traditional textbook providing grammar exercises, explanations, and cultural readings. (p. 521)

In their study, Herron and Hanley (1992) found that *French in Action* was more effective than a traditional text-oriented curriculum in improving learners' listening comprehension.

However, there are certain limitations of using controlled videos. Since the goal of instruction is primary, often created videos lack in entertainment value. Furthermore, by drawing learner's conscious attention to a specific target language feature, these videos tend to ignore a more meaning-focused form of instruction (Holden, 2000). According to Garza (1996), the scripted language, situations, and characters in created videos could produce unreal depictions of the target language and culture. In order to address the shortcomings of contrived videos, researchers have proposed using authentic videos in class.

The term authentic refers to videos that are 'created by native speakers for native speakers for consumption in a native environment' (Garza, 2009). These videos are

created for entertainment, and not for language teaching (Stempleski, 1987). Authentic videos include programs that we watch on TV, at the cinema, on videocassettes, or on DVDs. Sherman (2003) divided these videos into two categories: video drama, and non-fiction video. While video drama includes fictional programs like films, drama series, sitcoms, soap operas, etc., non-fiction videos are programs about real life like documentaries, interviews, talk shows, and promotional clips like TV commercials.

Authentic videos have been effective in teaching different aspects of the language. In a study on authentic television programming, Weyers (1999) found that exposure to a Spanish-language *telenovela*, or soap opera, helped students improve their communicative competence. The soap opera was effective in increasing students' listening comprehension skills, and two other important components of communicative competence: confidence in generating output, and detail in narrative discourse. Based on the current and previous studies, Weyers (1999) offered many advantages of using authentic videos that continue to hold true:

1. Unlike the graded linguistic input of the commercially prepared video programs, soap operas provide more genuine language samples from the target language.
2. The logical transitions of the story line in the soap opera helps students understand the episodic nature of communication.
3. Authentic videos inspire confidence in students, and make them feel less inhibited about using the second language.
4. Since target-language television programming is a community resource, using it to teach foreign language also fulfills Goal 5 of the National Standards for foreign language learning.

In a similar line of thought, Rifkin (2000) found that integrating films in the language curriculum helped the learners in his study achieve advanced levels of speech according to the ACTFL oral proficiency guidelines. Rifkin (2000) proposed a film-based conversation course during which the learners used films as the source of comprehensible input to complete a series of level appropriate tasks. The tasks included working on syntactical devices that required them to communicate the narrative, describe characters, and argue from the perspective of a character in the films. According to Rifkin (2000), the medium of film and video was useful for modeling linguistic features associated with advanced levels of speech like narration, description, argument, and hypothesis. In his concluding remarks, Rifkin reported students' favorable opinions on the course, which provided support to using videos and films to generate students' interest in language learning. Holden (2000) reported a similar favorable relation between using films and students' interest in learning English in Japan. Through his classroom experience, Holden found that integrating films in language lessons motivated learners to engage in listening activities outside of class. He argued for incorporating film response journals in the language classroom as an engaging and useful way to provide linguistic and cultural input.

The advancement of technology in the twenty-first century has opened up new avenues for using videos in the language classroom. The emergence of YouTube in particular has made the use of videos easier and more accessible. As Terantino (2011) points out:

YouTube offers fast and fun access to language and culture-based videos and instruction from all over the globe. It provides an outlet for student and teacher-created videos, and most importantly, YouTube videos provide students with an

opportunity to engage meaningfully in the target language. (p. 11)

YouTube videos can be particularly useful in teaching less commonly taught languages and cultures. Given the promising possibilities of YouTube, it is essential that more research be undertaken to prove the efficacy of the medium.

### **Videos for Teaching Culture**

Carol Herron and her colleagues (1992; 1999; 2000; 2002); have found that videos are effective in teaching culture across different proficiency levels. In a study with elementary school students, Herron and Hanley (1992) found that short video clips can enhance learners' retention of cultural information. The researchers divided fifty-six fifth grade students studying French into two groups, and taught them readings focused on cultural topics like transportation, friendship and dating, exercise, and healthcare. While one group of students only read the text, the other group watched a video prior to the reading. The video was similar in theme to the reading, and showed young French-speaking people interacting in authentic cultural situations like in cafés, restaurants, and banks. Students were assessed on a written quiz, which revealed that students who watched the video remembered more information about French culture than those who only read the text. According to Herron and Hanley, these findings show that videos can be effective in introducing cultural information, and should be incorporated in the foreign language curriculum.

In another study, Herron et al. (1999) concluded that videos can increase the overall cultural knowledge of foreign language learners at an introductory level. The researchers



used videos from the multimedia instructional program *French in Action* (Capretz, 1988; 1994) to teach culture to college students in second semester French. The pretest and posttest survey scores indicated an overall increase in both little “c” and big “C” culture, and showed that students gained more little “c” than big “C” knowledge. The researchers also used a questionnaire to study students’ perceptions about the type of cultural information presented and learned from the videos. Even though the curriculum did not weigh in favor of little “c”, the students believed that they saw and learned more little “c” than big “C” from the videos.

Interpreting the results from this study, Herron et al. (1999) argued that students are more interested in how people behave than in cultural achievements as this type of knowledge is more useful for active communication. According to the researchers, learning to behave in a foreign country could possibly have more immediate utility for students planning of traveling or working abroad. In addition, students could retain more little “c” than big “C” culture from the videos because “popular culture is part of the students’ reality” (p. 525). In other words, cultural practices are a bigger part of student’s lives as they engage in everyday activities like shopping, eating in a restaurant, and visiting friends more frequently than they visit museums or discuss historical events. Herron et al. (2000) arrived at similar conclusions in a study that proved that novice French learners improved their cultural knowledge on watching videos (from *French in Action*). In addition, the researchers also found that videos enhanced students’ ability to orally respond in a culturally appropriate manner. Students responded with more than 60%

accuracy on oral tests based on cultural information shown in the videos. This study further strengthened the case for using videos to teach culture at the introductory level.

Videos have also been found to enhance the cultural knowledge of intermediate level language learners (Herron & Hanley, 2002). Building on their previous research, the scholars investigated the effects of journalistic videos, and found that students gained more knowledge about the French culture from the videos. In terms of the amount of knowledge gained, the pretest/posttest scores indicated no difference between little “c” and big “C” culture. The researches attributed this result to the nature of journalistic videos. These journalistic videos, or “semi-authentic” videos as Garza (2009) calls them, included on spot interviews with different native speakers of French. Students did not retain cultural practices more as these videos did not always show behavioral patterns of the native speakers, concluded the researchers. (For more details on the journalistic videos used in this study see Muyskens, Harlow, Vialet, & Briere, 1998, as cited in Herron & Hanley, 2002.)

The different studies conducted by Herron and her colleagues have shown that:

1. Videos help learners retain cultural information.
2. Videos increase overall cultural knowledge for beginning and intermediate level students.
3. Videos improve learner’s ability to respond in a culturally appropriate manner.
4. Videos, especially narrative videos, help learners observe and remember cultural patterns more than cultural achievements.

The above mentioned studies thus offer strong evidence in favor of using videos for teaching culture. However, these studies limit the idea of culture to products and

practices only. Herron and Hanley (2002) acknowledge this limitation and call for more research in the area of using video to study the interconnected nature of products, practices and perspectives.

The literature reviewed on the use of videos in the foreign language classroom shows that videos are a valuable teaching resource. Videos have the potential to enhance listening and speaking skills. However, the use of videos for teaching culture reveals a paucity of studies and classroom approaches. So far videos have primarily been used to teach cultural facts. Although cultural facts are important in a foreign language classroom, a fact-oriented approach alone does not develop complete cultural understanding in students. The gap in research in using videos to teach cultural perspectives reinforces the need for developing pedagogical models and techniques that can lead students towards a critical-thinking approach to cultural learning.

Another trend that emerges from the literature review is that both authentic and instructional videos can be successful in teaching language and culture. There are pros and cons associated for both kinds of videos. Videos created for the purpose of instruction allow opportunities for a more focused form of instruction, where learners' attention can be drawn towards specific linguistic forms as well as given cultural facts. On the other hand, authentic videos provide a less contrived representation of the target language and culture, and generate more interest in students. With respect to the debate between authentic vs. contrived, Gilmore (2007) offers a compelling argument. He reminds teachers that the goal of classroom materials is to produce learners "who are able

to communicate effectively in the target language of a particular speech community, that is to say, learners who are communicatively competent” (p. 2). To reach this goal Gilmore suggests that teachers should be allowed to use any means at their disposal, regardless of the authenticity or contrivance of the material. Adding to Gilmore’s views, I would argue that both contrived and authentic videos are useful provided teachers adopt a well-informed approach when using them for instruction. As Lebedko (1999) remarked “videos are a perfect sources of teaching culture, but the question arises as to how to maximize the benefits of videos for teaching culture. The difficulty lies in designing the accompanying tasks” (p. 1).

In the next chapter I propose a classroom model for teaching culture using videos. The model draws on the many benefits of using videos, which are summarized in the following section.

### **Advantages of Using Videos for Teaching Culture**

The following advantages emerged from the studies reviewed in the previous section and other relevant literature on the use of videos in the foreign language classroom:

1. Videos provide an authentic, real world exposure to how communication takes place amongst native speakers, thus helping learners establish a closer connection to the target culture and community (Altman, 1989).
2. The myriad visual details encountered in a video can help foreign language learners glean rich cultural information (Altman, 1989).
3. Videos bring diverse language usage patterns to the classroom, thus acting as an accurate linguistic resource for accents, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and all kinds of discourses (Lonergan, 1984; Sherman, 2003).

4. Videos acquaint learners with regional differences, and exemplify different contextual uses of the language (Garza, 1996; Lonergan 1984; Sherman, 2003; Stempleski, 1987; Tognozzi, 2010).
5. Videos are an excellent medium to disseminate contemporary cultural information using the target language (Herron et al., 2000).
6. Videos provide students with easy access to images of the target culture and to native speakers of the target language (Herron et al., 2000).
7. Videos provide a meaningful context to language that is essential for communicative performance (Herron & Hanley, 1992; Lonergan, 1984).
8. Videos motivate students as they make the language learning process more fun and break classroom monotony. Students inspired this way tend to progress beyond just language learning, and become more perceptible to other cultural cues and insights (Wood, 1999).
9. Videos and films often engage the learner, helping the learners relate to the subjective experience of the characters, and experience their emotions vicariously (Fabe, 2004; Tognozzi, 2010; Wood, 1999).
10. A video's content and underlying message can also have an uplifting effect on the learner, making a huge difference to the learner's moods, attitudes, and motivation (Berk, 2009).

## **IV. DEVELOPING A CRITICAL-THINKING APPROACH TO CULTURE USING VIDEOS**

In the first section of this chapter, I propose a five stage model for developing a critical thinking approach to culture using videos. The second section provides a detailed example of how this model can be implemented in the foreign language classroom. The example shows how Hindi language learners can engage in a sequence of activities to develop a critical understanding of the idea of arranged marriage in India.

### **The Model**

The proposed model for developing a critical thinking approach to culture entails the following five stages:

1. Reflecting on one's own culture
2. Talking about the target culture
3. Articulating cultural differences
4. Understanding the target culture
5. Reflecting on the process of cultural learning.

The first step involves engaging learners in different preparatory activities where they learn to reflect on their own cultural framework. In the second stage, the students develop the necessary linguistic and analytic skills to talk about the given cultural phenomenon from the target culture. The third stage involves an analysis and description of the differences between the learner's first and target culture. In the fourth stage, learners hypothesize about the target culture and evaluate their hypothesis based on additional

sources of information. In the final stage, the learners reflect on their overall learning process.

The model aims to present an integrated approach to learning language and culture by focusing on two aspects: (a) the language in which culture is presented, and (b) the nature of tasks learners are expected to perform. With respect to the language, the model proposes selecting teaching materials that are just a little beyond the learners' proficiency level. If the teaching materials are too difficult for learners to understand linguistically, learners would be less receptive to the idea of learning culture. To further ensure that learners do not feel overwhelmed, the required output tasks should not add extra cognitive load on the learners. Overall, the instructor should strike a right balance between the complexity of the source language chosen, and the cultural issue under discussion.

This model envisions a partnership between the teacher and the student in the process of exploring culture. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator rather than a lecturer. Instead of imparting facts about the target culture, the teacher leads students through a process of discovery. The learner similarly is not the passive recipient of cultural information. Instead, the learner is actively engaged in exploring the target culture through a process of observation, comprehension, description, and reflection.

The following section provides an extended illustration on how the different aspects of the above model can be incorporated to teach culture in the foreign language classroom.

## **Match.com vs. Shaadi.com: Understanding the Culture of ‘Arranged Marriage’ in India**

This section describes a video-based lesson plan for teaching the cultural aspects of arranged marriage to intermediate level learners of Hindi. The proposed lesson plan is arranged into the following categories:

1. Teaching context
2. Instructional goal
3. Topic rationale
4. Teaching materials
5. Lesson design

### **Teaching Context**

This classroom application is designed for fourth semester learners of Hindi at the University level. By ACTFL standards, these students are at the mid intermediate level. This implies that learners at this stage in the Hindi program are able to sustain a range of conversation and practical tasks on personal and practical topics, especially as pertaining to situations in India. They are able to express needs and wants, to articulate problems and difficulties, and explain sets of personal circumstances, and to formulate questions on the same. With respect to listening, learners are able to understand clearly presented sequential information, within predictable contexts and with mostly familiar vocabulary, whether face-to-face or in recordings. They are also able to get some gist from speech representing a higher linguistic range. The learners are able to read and understand simple



texts within a limited sphere of social and domestic contexts. They are able to follow some elements of more complex narratives and descriptions, and make allowance for idiosyncrasies of writing style like the use of Hinglish in Hindi. The learners are also able to write about personal circumstances, routines and other simple matters across several time-frames and with appropriate use of grammatical aspect.

### **Instructional Goal**

The following pedagogical application attempts to go beyond learners' superficial knowledge of arranged marriage in India, making the learners aware of the cultural beliefs and values that define and shape the institution of marriage in India.

### **Topic Rationale**

The topic of arranged marriage in India has always captured popular attention with Hindi language learners in the West, yet the concept is never explored deeply enough in the language classroom. The concept is often discussed only at a factual level, thus engendering stereotypes, such as everyone in India has an arranged marriage, young people in India have little choice in who they marry, parents alone decide who their child's life partner should be, and so on. Such generalized opinions are often oblivious to the cultural significance behind the tradition of arranged marriage. Hindi language learners often fail to understand the deeper family values associated with this traditional system of marriage. Further, learners are unaware of how this marital system has evolved in contemporary times.

## Teaching Materials

**Videos:** The proposed classroom application uses four videos taken from YouTube. The first two introductory videos are advertisements for a popular online dating website in America, called Match.com: *Big City*<sup>1</sup> and *Bars and Parties 30*<sup>2</sup>. The videos for Hindi are taken from a very popular online matrimonial service website called Shaadi.com: *A Suitable Boy*<sup>3</sup> and *Aaj Match hai na*<sup>4</sup>? The content of each video is briefly described below.

*Content in Videos for Match.com:* In the first thirty second commercial titled ‘Big City,’ we see actual footage of a member of Match.com on her first date. She explains that she joined the online dating site to take charge of her life. It has been difficult for her to meet someone in a big city. The video ends with the service providers claiming that the world has changed and that one in five relationships in the U.S. now begins on an online dating site. In a similar vein, the second commercial, ‘Bars and Parties 30,’ also showcases a similar scenario, with a voice over claiming that Americans are now more likely to meet their future spouse online than at bars, parties, or any other social events put together. The two commercials end with a similar punch line: ‘the ways we meet people have changed, but the way we date hasn’t.’

*Content in Videos for Shaadi.com:* The first video—A Suitable Boy—humorously narrates a family’s search for an ‘ideal groom’ for their girl. Only, each family member is

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiVyoRJmeg:>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzTg1JEGC3M>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JR3H3bqqjzs>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coSoK8WzwmU>

on the lookout for different qualities in the perfect groom! For instance, while the girl's younger sister only thinks that good looks in the groom are important, the girl's uncle seeks a groom with strong traditional values. The girl's aunt, on the other hand, thinks that only a family-oriented man is the right choice. The commercial remarks that even with all these differing viewpoints, no one in the family seems to understand what qualities in the groom the girl herself is seeking. Shaadi.com's pitch in the end is that it alone understands the needs of the girl and all her relatives, and can therefore help in finding the truly perfect groom. The second video called '*Aaj Match hai na?*' presents a similar situation where a boy's family is on the lookout for a suitable bride. Again, the service provider's pitch is that it can identify the right kind of brides for the man since it alone understands what both he and his family members want.

The following features make these videos a good fit for teaching the topic of arranged marriage in India for this group of learners:

1. *Short duration*: These videos do not take too much class time and are more likely to retain learner's attention than longer videos.
2. *Similar style and theme*: The two videos for each website are similar in style and related in theme, so they can be played in succession.
3. *Authentic linguistic features*: The Hindi videos provide authentic language input as they use colloquial Hindi and an informal register. The videos also include some *Hinglish* expressions that learners would find easy to comprehend.
4. *Appropriate level*: The videos are suitable for intermediate level learners as learners at this stage are well versed with everyday expressions, and familiar with the use of Hinglish in Hindi, as discussed above.
5. *Suitable content*: These videos' high correspondence between action and the narrative facilitates learners' comprehension.

**Additional Teaching Materials:** In addition to the videos, the supporting teaching materials in this proposal include authentic readings from leading newspapers and online blogs in Hindi. These reading materials are meant to further expose learners to native speakers' opinions about arranged marriage in India.

### **Lesson Design**

The lesson follows the five-stage critical-thinking model for learning culture proposed in the previous section. A description of the activities planned for each stage in the model is provided below:

- 1. Reflecting on one's own culture:** Learners engage in a series of activities that prepare them to talk about the given topic, and help them reflect on their own culture.

*Activity 1 - Defining Marriage:* In this preparatory activity, learners use the technique of word association to provide different adjectives that describe marriage. Based on the words they choose, learners attempt to define what marriage is. This activity helps learners review vocabulary and related grammatical concepts needed to describe relationships, family, love, and companionship. Once the learners have articulated their respective definitions, the teacher discusses the diversity of responses in light of individual differences. The teacher encourages the students to reflect on why people chose different adjectives to describe the same concept and whether the learner's choice

of word was guided by what he or she thought is most important in a marriage. The overall purpose of this activity is to initiate discussion on a cultural topic, and introduce learners to the idea of diversity of beliefs.

*Activity 2 - Watching and Describing Videos from Match.com:* The learners watch the two videos from Match.com. Since the videos are in English, a subsequent comprehension check is not necessary. After the viewing, the teacher asks the class to describe the videos in Hindi. This activity reviews learners' narrative skills in the L2, and prepares them for a similar activity later. The activity also provides an excellent segue into discussing the interconnected nature of language and culture. For instance, learners would face some challenges trying to explain the word 'dating' in Hindi. The teacher can use this opportunity to point out that just like it is not always possible to transfer linguistic categories from L1 to L2; it is similarly not possible to extend a cultural concept from one culture to another.

*Activity 3 - Reflecting on the Videos:* The learners discuss their reactions to the videos with respect to the following questions: How do you feel about meeting someone via an online dating service? Do you think it is normal to 'arrange' to meet someone rather than meeting someone spontaneously at a social event? Do you think people can find their potential spouses on websites like Match.com? If people find someone they like, how long would they wait before they tell their families? The questions are meant to help learners explore their own cultural beliefs and practices.

**2. Talking about the Target Culture:** Learners develop the necessary linguistic and analytic skills to talk about the target culture.

*Activity 1 – Defining Arranged Marriage-* Similar to the activity done before, in this activity learners use the technique of word association to provide different adjectives that describe arranged marriage. Based on the words they choose, learners attempt to define the concept of arranged marriage and what it means to them.

*Activity 2- Watching Videos from Shaadi.com:* The teacher plays the two videos in class in succession. The videos are played multiple times in order to make sure that learners grasp the relatively fast pace of the spoken language.

*Activity 3 - Comprehension Check:* As discussed before, the language in the videos is appropriate for the intermediate language learner. However, to ensure that learners understand the video, a written script is provided. The learners read the script in class, and discuss the necessary vocabulary words with the teacher.

*Activity 4 - Describing the videos:* The learners sequentially describe the narrative of the two videos in Hindi. The activity can be done in groups, where one half of the class narrates the events from the first video, and the other half narrates the events of the second video.

**3. Articulating Cultural Differences:** Learners identify and analyze points of cultural differences between the videos from the two given sources.

*Activity 1 - Compare and Contrast the two videos:* Learners outline factual differences between the videos from Match.com and Shadi.com. Some of these differences could be: the number of people shown in the two videos; the range of colors; the choice of music and so forth.

*Activity 2 - Analyze the differences:* The learners explore cultural differences as represented in the videos. The following questions could serve as pointers for the analysis: How was the idea of ‘arranged meeting’ represented in the two videos? What are some of the differences in the representation of ‘element of choice and agency’ in the two videos?

**4. Understanding the Target Culture:** Learners formulate a hypothesis about the target culture, and analyze the hypothesis in light of additional information.

*Activity 1 - Hypothesizing about the target culture:* Based on what cultural differences learners found in the videos, they attempt to define their idea of arranged marriage in India. The following questions may serve as pointers to help learners articulate their hypotheses: Are people under pressure to get married in India? Do they have a choice in deciding who they marry? Do you think people find happiness in marriage in such situations? It is hypothesized that these questions are likely to elicit a stereotypical view considering that so far the target culture has been discussed only on factual terms.

*Activity 2 - Analyzing the hypothesis based on new information:* The students are asked to read newspaper articles that include opinion columns and online blogs in Hindi. They are then asked to ponder about the cultural issue at hand. Some of the questions they are

asked to think about are: What are people's views about arranged marriages in India? Do people trust marriage service websites like Shaadi.com? Does every youngster opt for an arranged marriage?

**5. Meta-Reflection:** Learners reflect on their overall learning process, and identify unexplored aspects of the cultural topic under discussion.

*Activity 1 - Final synthesis:* The learners synthesize their views on the given topic in the form of a written essay or an oral presentation. While the activities thus far are not expected to develop a complete understanding of arranged marriages in India, synthesizing their opinions helps learners demonstrate what they have learned so far. This final analysis can thus be used for assessment.

*Activity 2 - Identifying unanswered questions:* The purpose of this final activity is to help learners understand that cultural learning is an ongoing process. To that end, learners are asked to create a list of questions that they feel still need to be answered in order for them to further understand the culture of arranged marriage in India.

The proposed model and lesson plan can be extended to teach different aspects of the target culture. For instance, a similar pedagogical model can be used to explore the culture of food in India. In a lesson based around this theme, Hindi language learners in the U.S. could be asked to reflect on the cultural values associated with food in their own culture. As part of this self-reflection stage, learners could discuss the cultural beliefs behind eating 'organic food' in America. The following stage would entail introducing learners to a range of videos and other authentic reading materials that describe the



different types of food and species in India. In the subsequent stages, learners could be made to analyze cultural information in light of the following values associated with food in India: sanctity of the cooking space, hospitality, belief in non-violence, etc. The potential teaching resources for such a lesson could include: (a) Video clips from movies like *Swades*<sup>5</sup>; travel series like *Zyaka India ka*<sup>6</sup> ; Food Safari<sup>7</sup> and (b) Online reading resources like Wikipedia, BBC Hindi, and *Bharat Kosh*.

The suggested steps and activities are aimed at developing a critical understanding of the target culture. However, it is likely that a single lesson plan based around a cultural theme would not lead to a complete understanding of the target cultural phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to ensure that teaching culture is not restricted to a finite set of classroom activities. To that end, the proposed model suggests a framework for an ongoing process of cultural learning, where learners continue to explore and understand different facets of the target culture, while reflecting on their culture in the process.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3LOa-hPDJo>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHXtW7RQSQY>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgls-9sI0IQ&feature=channel>

## **V.CONCLUSION**

Today nobody denies the importance of developing cultural competence in the foreign language classroom. Over time, language educators have proposed different goals and approaches for teaching culture. In this respect, the National Standards have helped establish a professional consensus on the goals of language and culture teaching.

Traditional approaches to teaching culture were facts-oriented, where students learnt about culture through literary and historical texts. The approach gradually modified to include role play and group activities about everyday practices in the target culture, where learners studied behavioral differences through compare and contrast techniques. While the facts-oriented approach has been criticized for imparting a superficial understanding of culture, it has been found useful in learning contexts that have limited access to target culture resources. With the development of the Standards, a critical thinking approach emerged that encouraged comprehension of the underlying relationship between facts and the belief systems of the target culture.

An important resource for teaching culture is the use of videos, since this medium offers multiple benefits compared to other resources such as textbooks and still images.

However, videos have so far mainly been used to teach cultural facts, with limited or no attempt to promote critical thinking skills. In response to this gap, this report proposes a model that cultivates a critical thinking analysis of the target culture.

The proposed model integrates language and culture learning into a five stage process, where learners engage in critical understanding of the target culture by analyzing their

own culture, talking about the target culture, articulating cultural differences, and ultimately reflecting on the process of cultural learning. The model was illustrated with an example on how university level students of Hindi could move beyond factual knowledge regarding arranged marriages, to become aware of the cultural beliefs and values that shape the institution of marriage in India.

In proposing this model, this report hopes to contribute to the growing field of cross-cultural understanding in the field of language education. Empirical studies are needed, however, to evaluate the efficacy of the proposed model.

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